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## *About the Author*

**F**OR CONCERT CELLIST DIMITRY MARKEVITCH, authenticity is of paramount importance. A close disciple of the late Gregor Piatigorsky, he begins his preparation of any work with an intensive study of the score—preferably the original manuscript. During such research, he rediscovered a set of manuscripts of Bach’s suites for unaccompanied cello, which he edited for publication in the United States by Theodore Presser. Markevitch introduced the new edition at a memorable concert in Carnegie Hall. He has also rediscovered a lost sonata for cello and piano, opus 64 of Beethoven, which he edited for publication by Presser. He has contributed to editions of works by Mussorgsky, de Falla, Stravinsky, and Shostakovitch.

Another manifestation of Markevitch’s concern for authenticity is his use of a baroque cello in performing music that predates the nineteenth century. His instrument—made at the beginning of the eighteenth century by Jacques Bocquay, one of the first great French luthiers—has been carefully restored by Étienne Vatelot of Paris, a master instrument maker, and Luthfi Becker, a specialist in baroque instruments. Markevitch plays this instrument with an au-

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thetic baroque bow—a copy made for him by Jean-Yves Matter of Strasbourg of a bow contemporary with his cello that is now in the Museum of Instruments of the Paris Conservatory. The French film director François Reichenbach has made a film in which Markevitch demonstrates the differences between a modern cello and a baroque.

Dimitry Markevitch made the first complete recording of the Sonata for unaccompanied cello opus 8 of Zoltan Kodály. He has also recorded the Sonata for cello and piano opus 40 of Shostakovitch and two sonatas for cello and piano by Louis Abbiate (with Bernard Ringeissen). He is a member of the American Musicological Society and of the Société Française de Musicologie; and he founded the Institute for Advanced Musical Studies in Switzerland. He teaches cello at the École Normale de Musique and at the Conservatoire Serge Rachmaninoff—both in Paris.

# *Prelude*

WHEN YOU ASK A MUSIC LOVER to name his favorite instrument, there is a strong likelihood he will answer: "The cello—no other instrument possesses to such a degree the tones of the human voice nor touches the heart so directly." However, a humorist might say: "The cello? It is simply a double bass that has had bad luck."

For nearly five hundred years, the development of the cello has traveled a rocky road, full of ups and downs. I am going to try—to the best of my ability—to describe its history, which is truly an epic. This endeavor will be a labor of love, for the cello has become a large part of my life, and I have known it for a long time. Each day, I succeed in uncovering more of its resources, which are virtually inexhaustible. The possibilities for musical expression which it alone offers are immense. With it, one can appreciate Verlaine's vow: "music, above all things." It is my friend . . . my confidant; and everything that concerns it interests me.

The cello is fascinating in all its aspects: its origin, its development, its great makers, its celebrated players, the music written for

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it, the mysteries of its superb sonority—and a great many others. These aspects taken individually might each serve as the basis of a separate work. Publications dealing primarily with the cello are limited, however, and most of them dwell on the mistaken concept that the cello is a derivative of the gamba—an error based on false premises but the general rule for many years. Unfortunately, this myth that the viola da gamba was the ancestor of the cello is still well established in certain minds. I hope the section devoted to the origin and history of the instrument presented here sheds some light on this problem.

The great performing artists of the cello have been the object of veritable worship on the part of their admirers, for this beautiful instrument never fails to stir the emotions; and those adept at playing it have a vehicle that enables them to display—and evoke—great passion.

Thus history, fact, and personal anecdote blend here to provide a complete story of the instrument. May this book entertain you, help you to know the cello to the fullest, and lead you to love it as I do.

# The Instrument

**M**AKING STRINGED INSTRUMENTS (*lutherie*) is a noble profession. What a marvelous vocation—to know how to choose woods, to handle them, and to fashion them into works of art that come to life in the hands of artists interpreting the music of the great composers.

Watching an instrument-maker of today closely, one sees him follow the same procedures his illustrious predecessors used four hundred years ago (*Figure 1*). Andrea Amati (c. 1505–c. 1580)—the first great maker from Cremona, the Italian center of lutherie—constructed a cello in the same way it is done today. He needed about fifty pieces of specific kinds of wood, which he had to cut to a particular design, then model, sculpt, assemble, stain, and varnish—all by hand. One cannot escape being fascinated by the results—these thrilling members of the violin family. They allow one to express the most profound feelings, to convey emotions that stir the soul, and yet to give a sensation of total peace.

Let us carefully examine a violoncello in an attempt to penetrate the mystery of this miraculous object (*Figure 2*). The woods are rather ordinary: Swiss or Tyrolean pine for the top, maple for the back, sides, neck, and scroll (as well as the bridge), and ebony for the fingerboard,

# The Performers

## PRODIGIES YOUNG AND OLD

**A** CELLO CAN BE PLAYED by a young child, providing the size of the instrument is adapted to the size of the child, and by a very old person as well, since its player is sitting down.

At present, particularly in Japan, the cello is taught to children as young as four years old using the precepts of Shinichi Suzuki. This remarkable method of training, which has been producing good results for many years, was originally conceived for the violin; but it has been adapted to the cello, the viola, and even to the piano and flute (*Figure 27.*)

Child prodigies have always attracted the attention of the public. One of the first of these, Benjamin Hallet appeared at London's new Haymarket Theatre in 1749. He was only six years old and he was either dressed as a little girl in a gown with petticoats or made up to represent Cupid; but when he played his cello solos, he drew much applause (*Figure 28*). In the 1770s, a Polish prodigy named Nicholas Zygmuntowski made a grand tour of Europe at the age of seven. He performed successfully in Paris, and the *Journal de Paris* said of him, "He plays with the utmost accuracy, observes precisely the pianos and fortes, and generally everything is done with taste and given musical expression."